



pyrenees and ebro steppes

11 ~ 17 JUNE 2006

trip report

Leaders: Santiago Villa & Adrian Binns

Participants: Phil and Leslie Hassel, Steve Moore, Margie Rahner and Mary Geiger

HIGHLIGHTS

This trip was co-led by Spainbirds and Jaeger Tours guides. Although we had a couple of days quite warm we were really lucky with the weather, even in the steppes, having a cloudy day far from the usual terrible temperatures of this time of the year.

Once all participants were collected at the Madrid airport and just before heading to the Pyrenees we spent a nice couple of hours in the Henares river where we saw two fledged chicks **Eagle Owl** and a beautiful adult roosting. In the reedbeds we also found at least two **Penduline Tits**, both young birds. Five Golden Oriols, Green Woopeckers (Sharpei race), Bee-eaters and Red-billed Chough were all seen in the same spot, whilst Great Reed Warbler was singing into the reeds when we had our lunch.

In the Pyrenees we stayed in Hotel Uson, at the Hecho Valley, which gave us the chance to visit different valleys mainly in the Eastern side of the mountains. A charming rural hotel with excellent evening meals. Unfortunately some roads were blocked by works and we had to travel South a couple of times doing a longer journey than expected, however and as compensation, we had our best views of **Lammergeiers** in the Roncal valley. A total of 5 were seen the first day in the mountains along the "Superior" Hecho Valley. Amongst the raptors seen in the Pyrenees were Egyptian Vulture, Golden, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, the ubiquitous Griffon Vulture and two **Honey Buzzards**. A male Montagu's was also found the last day in the Quer plains and a nice Peregrine (Brookei ssp.) sitting in a cliff the first day in the Henares river.

The alpine specialities included views, besides the Lammergeier, of **Wallcreeper** in the traditional site near Gabardito (no signs of "willy" in the Boca del Infierno after trying three times during the week), **Citril Finches**, specially well seen in Belagua, **Alpine Accentor**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**, **Black Woodpecker** (a superb male in San Juan de la Peña), Eagle Owl, **Eurasian Nightjar**, **Red-backed Shrikes** (seen every single day), **Alpine Chough** and **Water Pipit**. Unfortunately we missed the Snow Finch in Candanchú after a long but very interesting walk uphill. However we had an amazing prize when a **White-backed Woodpecker** crossed a small valley near Belagua and came towards us to disappear then into the old Firs and Beeches forest. We couldn't believe it! We were really lucky to see one of the most elusive and scarce birds of the region with no more than 100 pairs breeding in the whole Spain. Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins and Rock

Buntings were recorded several times and Rock Sparrows specially well seen in Jaca. The Wallcreeper experience was again incredible with a male showing well on top of the rocky face and without doubt was one of the favourite birds of the total 129 species recorded in the trip.

This was also a very productive trip for butterflies being seen a total of 46 species. We shouldn't forget to



Alpine Accentor near Belagua / Photo: Spainbirds



Spanish Gatekeeper at Riglos / Photo: Spainbirds



Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush at Candanchú / Photo: Spainbirds

mention Southern Marbled Skipper, Clouded Apollo, Provence Orange Tip, Blue-Spot and Sloe Hairstreaks, Peacock, Queen of Spain and Provençal Fritillaries, De Prunner's and Piedmont Ringlets, Spanish Gatekeeper and Pearly Heath amongst others.

Before travelling South to Belchite steppes we stopped near Berdún providing the chance to see Tawny Pipit, Melodious Warbler, Crested Lark, Marsh Harrier, Cirl Bunting, Woodchat Shrike and suprisingly a subadult **Black Stork** who was flying overhead for several minutes. The evening in the plains was quite good having views of **Greater, Lesser Short-toed, Calandra, Thekla** and **Crested Larks, Black-eared Wheatear**, two **Stone Curlews, Black-bellied** and **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** drinking together in a pond at El Planerón reserve, Hoopoe and Southern Grey Shrikes. In the morning we tried for "el diablo", the elusive **Dupont's Lark** but just we had was a shy and brief call before dawn. Before heading to the airport we still had some time for birding near Guadalajara seen a distant **Great Bustard**. A nice way to finish an unforgettable tour!



Greater Short-toed Lark in Belchite / Photo: Phillip Hassel



View from Candanchú / Photo: Spainbirds